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St Patrick's students involved in unique dementia research project

St Patrick's Parish School students have been participating in a unique research project being undertaken by the University of New South Wales and Sydney University. The project examines current attitudes of primary children towards older adults. It then endeavours to improve the children's awareness and understanding of the issues facing older adults through a targeted educational program. It then focuses, in particular, on the impact and prevalence of dementia in families and the wider community. Mrs Frances Robertson, Principal at St Patrick's said that over 60 students in Years 5 and 6 at the school have been involved with the research study since early August. Mrs Robertson was very pleased with the way the students have embraced this innovative program.

Children learn about dementia through the engaging animated story of Ollie a 10 year old boy, Ruby his 12 year old sister, and their Pops-who they have noticed is starting to act a little differently than usual. The seven short modules, including consumers speaking candidly about the condition covers topics such as: "What causes dementia?", "How does it feel to have dementia?", "How can we keep our brain healthy?" and "What happens in a nursing home?" Each 25 minute module is accompanied by an activity, such as an interactive brain game, discussion, role-plays, or drawing. The research project runs over five to six weeks with a total of 120 minutes of instruction and practical applications.

The research project has been designed in collaboration with the researchers and class room teachers. The evidence based program aligns with Stage 3 PDHPE, English and Science Skills Knowledge and Understanding curriculum outcomes. The program was developed by a team from the two universities under the direction of Dr Jess Baker.

Prior to the project starting, the students completed a questionnaire regarding their attitudes towards older people. They will complete a second questionnaire once the modules have been completed. This will assist the researchers in measuring the success of the educational program that is being trialled at the school.

Kevin Dunne has been working with the classroom teachers in implementing the program at the school. He has been delighted with the interest and

involvement of the students since the modules began.

"Several students have shared their stories of their own grandparents and their struggles with loss of memory and becoming angry really quickly". Kevin commented. "The students really enjoyed the interactive brain game activity where they could tap on a lobe of the brain and see what particular function it performs".

September is Dementia Awareness Month. A third of young people know someone living with dementia. Presently, there are around 413,000 people living with dementia in Australia with this figure expected to climb to 900,000 by 2050.

Students at St Patrick's and their parents have been invited to be part of Dementia Awareness Month and join in the Memory Walk and Jog being hosted by Yallambee Lodge in Cooma North. There are three choices of walks: 1km, 3km or 5km. The Walk is on Saturday 16 September with registrations commencing at 9.45 am with the walk due to start at 10.30 am. Everyone in the community is invited to

participate. The Walk will start and finish at Yallambee Lodge. Cost is \$10 for individuals and \$20 for families. There will be a sausage sizzle at the end of the walk. For further information and to register before the day please ring Yallambee Lodge on 6452 1669.